

# Trajectories of dance on the surface of theatrical meanings: a contribution to the theory of *rasa* from the fourth chapter of the *Abhinavabhāratī*

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## Introduction

From the time of Abhinavagupta onwards, if not already from that of his immediate predecessors, Indian aesthetics has been mainly focusing on *rasa*, the essence of the play, as experienced by the spectator witnessing a work of art.<sup>1</sup> In the *Abhinavabhāratī* [ABh], a commentary on the *Nāṭyaśāstra* [NŚ],<sup>2</sup> all the elements of theatre are organised around this spectator-oriented *rasa* theory, so that even in the chapters dealing with scenic techniques, constant reference is made to the central discussion on the theory of art reception presented by Abhinavagupta in the sixth and seventh chapters of his work, consecrated to *rasas* ('aesthetic emotions') and *bhāvas* ('mental states') respectively. This interpretative attitude, by which every element of the performance finds its proper place in so far as it contributes to the arousal or 'production' (*niṣpatti*) of *rasa*, is traceable in the whole *Abhinavabhāratī*; I shall hence adopt this same perspective as a point of departure in the present enquiry about the place and purpose of dance in Indian dramatic theory. As part and parcel of the theatrical device, dance (*nṛtta*) is discussed by Abhinavagupta in the fourth chapter of his commentary. Given the premises just outlined, are we justified to attribute an active role to it within the aesthetic process culminating in the *rasa* experience, or should dance be regarded as a simple embellishment of the dramatic performance?

Apart from the peculiar way in which every element of theatre is treated in the *Abhinavabhāratī* in its relation to the *rasa*, an inquiry about the specific role of dance as an art ancillary to theatre finds further justification in the place already attributed to it by Bharata. The position of the fourth chapter, where dance is dealt with, deserves to be considered in the larger configuration of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and its narrative structure. According to the story which provides a frame to the exposition of the 'Treatise on Theatre', its mythical author Bharata, requested by an assembly of sages, starts to explain the theatrical art, replete with all its intricacies. This preliminary narrative, set as a dialogue, corresponds to what I will call here the 'primary level of narration', that is, Bharata's instruction about theatre, as carried forward through the questions of the sages. Bharata's exposition begins with the account of the circumstances which led to the creation of theatre as an object of diversion that could be

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<sup>1</sup> Śrī Śaṅkuka and Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka, two earlier commentators on the *Nāṭyaśāstra* both writing in the ninth century, had already adopted a spectator's perspective in their conception of *rasa*, although their works are no longer available except from quotations scattered in Abhinavagupta's *Abhinavabhāratī* and in a few other texts. For a study about the major changes in Indian aesthetic theory prior to Abhinavagupta, see for instance Pollock (1998), and, with particular reference to Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka's role in building up an aesthetic theory centred on the experience of the spectator, see Pollock (2010).

<sup>2</sup> Unless stated otherwise, all the quotations and page numbers of NŚ and ABh are from the edition by Kavi (see bibliography).

audible (*śravya*) as well as visible (*dr̥ṣya*). Bharata describes how Brahmā actually created the theatrical object by assembling together various elements taken from the Vedas, and how subsequently he and his troupe of actors prepared for a performance. When the play was first presented to Brahmā however, a group of obstacles (literally, the ‘*vighnas*’) disturbed the performance, so that it became necessary to build a playhouse in order to ward them off. Also, various deities were appointed to the different areas of the stage in order to protect the actors. These events belong to a ‘secondary level of narration’, corresponding to the mythical account about the origins of theatre and removed in time from the events taking place in the primary narration. Unfolding in the first chapter of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, where the (primary) narrative frame for the entire treatise is set up and the theoretical bases for the exposition of the theatrical art are laid down, the account of the origins is interrupted by two ‘accessory’ chapters in which minute details about the construction of the playhouse and the consecration of the scenic space are provided. These two sections, forming the subject of the second and third chapter of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, constitute a sort of digression with respect to the secondary narration and, since they are occasioned by the sages’ demand for further technical instruction, they may be considered as actually part of the primary narrative level. The mythical account, in fact, ideally proceeds only in the fourth chapter: having failed to present the first play to Brahmā, Bharata and the actors are requested to get ready for another representation to be shown, this time, to Śiva. According to the myth, the introduction of dance into theatre should be regarded as the main contribution of Śiva himself, who, after watching the performance, suggested its introduction in the ‘preliminary rite’ (*pūrvaraṅga*)<sup>3</sup> so as to make it variegated.<sup>4</sup> The details about the performance of the preliminary rite are given in the fifth chapter, followed by two chapters, central in importance, concerning *rasas* and *bhāvas*, in which Bharata first delineates an aesthetic theory. The rest of the text is devoted to the systematic exposition of all the spectacular elements of theatre, starting with the fourfold representation (*abhinaya*) (ch. 8-12, 14-19, 21-25) and ending with a long section devoted to vocal and instrumental music (ch. 28-34). The secondary narration about the origins of theatre is brought to an end in the last chapters (ch. 36-37), with an account of its descent among humans as a result of a curse put upon the actors.

The position of the fourth chapter is thus peculiar since, even though it is closely linked with the secondary narration, this chapter does not naturally fit in with the exposition of the whole of the theatrical material to the sages found further on in the text. Even if treated earlier within the narrative structure of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, dance represents a later addition to the other elements of theatre, the exposition of which it nevertheless presupposes.<sup>5</sup> According to the

<sup>3</sup> The ‘preliminary rite’ (*pūrvaraṅga*) consists of a series of scenic operations including the playing of instrumental music and singing, the recitation of a benedictory verse as well as the use of various codified gestures, executed by the director along with two assistants before the dramatic performance. The *pūrvaraṅga* traditionally ends with a prologue (*prarocanā*) introducing the topic of the play immediately following. On the elaborate procedure of the *pūrvaraṅga*, see Bansat-Boudon (1992: 67-80) and Tieken (2001).

<sup>4</sup> NS 4.13-15a: *mayāpīdam smṛtaṃ nṛtaṃ sandhyākāleṣu nṛtyatā | nānākaraṇasaṃyuktair aṅgaḥāir vibhūṣitam || pūrvaraṅgavidhāḥ asmim̐s tvayā samyak prayojyatām | vardhamānakayogeṣu gīteṣv āsāriteṣu ca || mahāgīteṣu caivārthān samyag evābhineṣyasi | yaś cāyaṃ pūrvaraṅgas tu tvayā śuddhaḥ prayojitaḥ || ebhir vimiśritaś cāyaṃ citro nāma bhaviṣyati |* “But I, for my part, who dance in the twilight hours, have recollected this, namely dance, adorned by *aṅgaḥāras* endowed with various *karaṇas*. May you use [it] in the proper way in the course of this *pūrvaraṅga*, [in particular] when *vardhamānakas* are performed, as well as in the *gītakas* and in the *āsāritas*. And in the *mahāgītas*, you should properly represent the meanings. Thus, the *pūrvaraṅga* that you have performed as pure will for sure become variegated once commingled with these [*aṅgaḥāras*].” In these verses, the technical terms *gītaka*, *āsārita*, *vardhamānaka* and *mahāgīta* refer to particular kinds of songs to be performed at given moments in the preliminary rite.

<sup>5</sup> The basic units of dance, the *karaṇas*, as well as the *aṅgaḥāras* made of them, are formed by combining various bodily movements in an uninterrupted ordered choreographic sequence. The basic movements forming larger units are classified and described in the section on the bodily representation (*āṅgikābhinaya*), in NS ch. 8-12.

myth, theatre is conceived at once by Brahmā, as a complete whole endowed with ordered parts, whereas dance is introduced only at a later time. Furthermore, it is said that dance was added to the preliminary rite, the origins of which are themselves quite problematic. Indeed, the *pūrvaraṅga* does not seem to be present in the first theatrical representation, but was apparently required to prevent the interferences, brought about by the obstacles on that occasion, to occur again in future performances.<sup>6</sup>

Now that dance has been characterised as a later addition, initially justified by the need to have a variegated kind of preliminary rite,<sup>7</sup> the text raises questions about its nature and the reasons for its creation. Immediately after the description of the technique of dance, the text of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* reads:

Since representation (*abhinaya*) has been conceived by those who know it for the sake of grasping the meanings, why has this dance (*nṛtta*) been made [and] what is the essence to which it conforms? It is not connected to the meanings of a song, nor does it put into being any meaning [itself]. Why has this dance been devised in [connection with] songs and *āsāritas*?<sup>8</sup>

It is not easy to evaluate the exact purport of this sentence in Bharata's order of ideas. It is true that the second part of the question might be quite safely related to the sphere of the preliminary rite, since the *āsāritas* are songs specific to the *pūrvaraṅga*, and since the details about the course of action combining dance, songs and instrumental music, follow immediately after in the same chapter. Moreover, in NŚ 5.153-154 it is specified that dance is performed as a sort of *intermezzo* between the various lines of the invocation (*nāndī*), the words of which, sung and accompanied by instrumental music, are represented through a system of codified bodily gestures (*āṅgikābhinaya*) by the actor/dancer, so that an alternation of *abhinaya*, a representation of the words of the song, and *nṛtta*, performed along with the music intervening between each verse of the *nāndī*, actually occurs. The presence of dance side by side with representation, the latter directly linked to the meanings of the song, the former apparently devoid of any relation to them, might have triggered a doubt about their respective uses within the *pūrvaraṅga*.<sup>9</sup> However, the question could be seen, from a broader perspective, as one

<sup>6</sup> If we rely on the mythological account of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the origins of the *pūrvaraṅga*, as well as the beginnings of its practice before the actual play, are obscure. The very first occurrence of the term '*pūrvaraṅga*' is in NŚ 4.10, where it is said to precede the performance shown to Śiva, without any previous hint about its introduction into the theatrical practice: *pūrvaraṅgaḥ kṛtaḥ pūrvam tatrāyaṁ dvijasattamāḥ | tathā tripuradāhaś ca ḍimasamjñāḥ prayojitaḥ ||* "On that occasion, the preliminary rite (*pūrvaraṅga*) was carried out first, oh Best among the twice-born. [Then], this [*samavakāra*] was put into performance, along with the *Tripuradāha* ("The Burning of Tripura") technically defined as a *ḍimā*". According to NŚ 1.56-57, the first performance ever was preceded by an invocation (*nāndī*) (*pūrvam kṛtā mayā nāndī*), followed by a reproduction (*anukṛti*) (*tadante 'nukṛtir baddhā*). The *Abhinavagupta* on these two verses reports and discusses different opinions about their possible interpretation. *Abhinavagupta* refuses the one according to which the mention of the *nāndī* could stand there as a synecdoche for the whole *pūrvaraṅga*, since its practice was instituted because of obstacles which had not yet come into the scene. Indeed, it is said that the *pūrvaraṅga* aims at delighting the deities appointed to the protection of the playhouse and thus brings about the pacification of the obstacles (ABh ad NŚ 1.56-57). This function, however, seems to be analogous to that of the *pūjā*, or *raṅgadaivatapūjana*, described in the second chapter of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, to which Bharata explicitly links the performance of the preliminary rite (NŚ 5.53-56). On the complex relationship between the *pūrvaraṅga* and the *pūjā*, see Bansat-Boudon (1992: 79-80) and Lidova (1994).

<sup>7</sup> The treatment of dance within the preliminary rite, which requires considerations of a different order, will not be dealt with since, as stated at the outset, the perspective adopted here is a specific one: instead of dealing with dance in isolation, this article rather sets to investigate the irruption of dance into the sphere of the theatrical representation and its aesthetic result.

<sup>8</sup> NŚ 4.261b-263a: *yadā prāptyarthaṁ arthānāṁ tajjñair abhinayaḥ kṛtaḥ || kasmān nṛttaṁ kṛtaṁ hy etad kaṁ svabhāvaṁ apekṣate | na gītākārthasambaddhaṁ na cāpy arthasya bhāvakaṁ || kasmān nṛttaṁ kṛtaṁ hy etad gūṭeṣv āsāriteṣu ca |*

<sup>9</sup> Part of the confusion between dance and *abhinaya* is due to the fact that representation in its bodily form

referring to the status of dance as an independent art form and to its later inclusion into theatre alongside its most characteristic feature, *abhinaya*. There are hints in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* itself which point to the fact that dance was not exclusively restricted to the preliminary rite. At the end of the fourth chapter, for instance, Bharata enumerates a number of situations, all dramatic, where the use of dance would be suitable –festivities, spring season, etc.–, and those where, on the contrary, it would be forbidden –when the heroine is sorrowful, for instance.<sup>10</sup>

The definition of representation is given in NŚ 8.7: “The verbal root *nī-*, preceded by [the prefix] *abhi-*, [is used with the sense of] bringing the meanings [directly] in front [of the spectator]. [The representation] is called *abhinaya* because it carries the word meanings [in the presence of the spectator].”<sup>11</sup> Representation, described as fourfold,<sup>12</sup> is hence defined according to its function within theatre, namely to communicate the meanings of the dramatic text to the audience. Regardless of how we conceive of the specific purport of the question raised in the fourth chapter, it is thus legitimate to ask what could be the function of the new object called ‘dance’, apparently unconnected to the meanings expressed in the songs or, more generally, incapable to produce any theatrical meaning.

The laconic answer provided by Bharata is as follows: “On this point, we say that dance does not conform to any meaning at all, but it can generate beauty (*śobhā*): that is why it has come into use.”<sup>13</sup> A straightforward translation of the term *śobhā* by the word ‘beauty’ may sound a little reductive and not unambiguous, given the fact that even in Western terminology, the concept of beauty in art and in aesthetic theory has received a multiplicity of interpretations.<sup>14</sup> The task proves even more arduous when one considers that, in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, a full-fledged aesthetics, which might be of help for the evaluation of this statement, is nowhere to be found. Indeed, no clear idea about a supposed aesthetic function of dance can be traced in NŚ ch. 4, nor is it possible to get any definite picture about the status of dance within the play itself from a limited set of verses of difficult interpretation. In other words, the question about how, when and where dance –along with its ‘meaning-bearing’ counterpart, representation (*abhinaya*)– was meant to be used within the theatrical performance remains a matter of speculation.<sup>15</sup>

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(*āṅgikābhinaya*) looks very similar to dance, in that it makes use of the same means of expression, the body, seen in its basic components of major limbs (*aṅgas*: head, hands, chest, sides, hips and feet) and minor limbs (*upāṅgas*: eyes, eyebrows, nose, lips, chin and mouth). In the chapters on *āṅgikābhinaya* the action of each limb is described along with the meaning it is apt to represent, while in the chapter on *nṛtta* the various actions are simply combined so as to form small units of movement called *karaṇas* and larger ones, called *aṅgahāras*.

<sup>10</sup> For such uses of dance, see NŚ 4.305-310. See also our remarks about the introduction of the *kaiśikī vṛtti* into the body of the performance below.

<sup>11</sup> NŚ 8.7: *abhipūrvas tu nīndhātur ābhimukhyārthanirṇaye | yasmāt padārthān nayati tasmād abhinayaḥ smṛtaḥ ||*

<sup>12</sup> The four types of representation are differentiated according to the means by which the representative function is carried out: the body, the voice, the mind and the costume. Thus, there is a bodily representation (*āṅgikābhinaya*), a vocal representation (*vācikābhinaya*), a mindful or psycho-physical representation (*sāttvikābhinaya*) and an ornamental representation (*āhāryābhinaya*). On the width of the semantic spectrum covered by the term ‘*abhinaya*’ with respect to the means involved, as opposed to a restricted concept of ‘acting’ or ‘reciting’ see Ganser (2009: 65-67).

<sup>13</sup> NŚ 4.263b-264a: *atrocyate na khalv arthaṁ kañcin nṛttam apekṣate || kiṁ tu śobhāṁ prajānayed iti nṛttam pravartitam |*

<sup>14</sup> As it is well-known, the concept of ‘beauty’ is a central one in the history of Western aesthetics and it has undergone major developments through the centuries. An informed study of ‘beauty’ in the Indian context still needs to be done. For the various words used for indicating ‘beauty’ or ‘beauty’-related concepts in the field of poetry, see Ingalls (1962). A significant step in the interpretation of such a concept in a broader cultural perspective has been made by D. Ali in his study on courtly culture. D. Ali speaks of “an enduring concern with beauty” and adds: “Indeed, I will suggest below that the theory of beauty was something like a worldview [...]” (Ali 2004: 143).

<sup>15</sup> Apart from the obvious difficulties in grasping the reality of scenic practices, given the ephemeral character of the performing arts, the written medium is certainly inadequate to account for such a living reality, be it in the

## 1. Abhinavagupta's evaluation of dance

With respect to the question raised in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the *Abhinavabhāratī* supplies a long commentary where more *pūrvapakṣas* intervene, in the typical śāstric form of debate, putting forth different interpretations of the issue before coming to the established position. Despite its difficulty, given the highly corrupt state of the text<sup>16</sup> and the number of interlocutors advancing a variety of preliminary views, this long discussion represents an articulate and sophisticated attempt to assess the status of dance and its aesthetic implications with regard to the *rasa* theory outlined by Abhinavagupta. Moreover, the text of the *Abhinavabhāratī* offers many insights into the practice of theatre and its allied arts, dance, music and singing, as they were popular in tenth-century Kaśmīr. I will here concentrate on some extracts exclusively, taken from the long commentary to NŚ 4.261b-263a (translated above), and on some related passages found elsewhere in the text. These will provide a key to the interpretation of the status of dance within the aesthetic process. At the end, I will outline a working hypothesis for the evaluation of dance as an element of the performance.

The first part of the discussion in Abhinavagupta's commentary is devoted to the question whether dance should be considered identical or different from theatre and, in this connection, to whether its purpose is identical or different from the one of theatre. After examining various opinions, a difference is proposed on the basis of the absence of representation (*abhinaya*) in dance. The text reads:

But that which is devoid of the various kinds of representation (*abhinaya*), consisting only of turning, revolving, stretching the eyebrows, moving the pupil of the eye, displacing the feet, shaking and oscillating, splitting the hips, [performing] the *recakas* etc., is what we mean by [the word] 'dance' (*nṛtta*).<sup>17</sup>

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form of theoretical and practical manuals, or in the form of dramatic texts. In the case of Bharata's theatre, we encounter a further difficulty: if we agree on the commonly accepted data for the composition of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* (second century BCE- second century CE?), there are no available plays contemporary to it, to the exclusion maybe of Aśvaghōṣa's. For a comparison with recent methodologies devised for keeping records of Indian performing art forms such as Kūṭiyāṭṭam, see for example the admirably conceived website of the "Bhāsa projekt Würzburg": <http://www.indologie.uni-wuerzburg.de/bhasa/rahmen.html>. Even though art forms like Kūṭiyāṭṭam are generally considered the 'inheritors' of the ancient tradition of Sanskrit theatre, the data available to us from contemporary sources must be handled with care. There has been a tendency among scholars, especially in the first pioneering studies on traditional Indian theatre, to superimpose what we see on the stage today to the understanding of ancient theatre as outlined by Bharata, so that a 'dance-character', similar to the one witnessed in today's forms of performance such as Bharatanatyam and Odissi, has been uncritically attributed to the theatre described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. For a telling specimen of such approach, see the introduction to the first English translation of Bharata's chapter on dance (Naidu 1980 [1936]: 1-16). In it, even the name *Nāṭyaśāstra* is translated as "the Science of Dancing" (*ibid.* p. 1), notwithstanding the fact that *nāṭya* means for Bharata simply 'theatre', while the term used for 'dance' is, on the contrary, *nṛtta*.

<sup>16</sup> On the deplorable state of the manuscripts of the fourth chapter that were used by Ramaswami Śāstri for the preparation of the second edition of the first volume of the *Abhinavabhāratī*, see the preface to NŚ and ABh vol. 1, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (1956: 23-25). The section under discussion, moreover, is not preserved in all the manuscripts containing the fourth chapter.

<sup>17</sup> ABh ad NŚ 4.261b-263a, vol. 1, p. 172-173: *yat tv abhinayādiśūnyaṃ kevalaṃ valanāvartanābhrūkṣepatārācalanacaranadhāraṇakampasphuritakaṭicchedarecakādi tad asmākaṃ nṛttaṃ bhaviṣyati*. Among the extant texts, the earliest definition of dance as a movement of limbs devoid of the representative function (*abhinaya*) appears in the *Avaloka* [AL], the commentary of Dhanika (tenth century) on Dhanañjaya's *Daśarūpaka* [DR] (tenth century). While the *Nāṭyaśāstra* ideally maintains an implicit binary

Of course, the mere description of the physical characteristics belonging to dance could apply even to the bodily representation (*āṅgikābhinaya*). Nevertheless, since it lacks the representative or narrative function, dance is described in negative terms as devoid of this fundamental feature of theatre, on which its possible assimilation to it depends.<sup>18</sup>

What is then the use of dance? Before looking at its specific function as envisaged by Abhinavagupta it would be useful to give a brief outline of the theory of representation put forth in the *Abhinavabhāratī*. The techniques of representation take up the largest portion of Bharata's treatise (roughly from chapter eight to chapter twenty-six), but the commentary on the eighth chapter, the first dealing with *abhinaya*, or, more precisely, with *āṅgikābhinaya*, is at present lost.<sup>19</sup> I deem it legitimate to suppose that a full-fledged theory of representation must have been present at that point, since Abhinavagupta refers on various occasions to discussions developed in this chapter.<sup>20</sup> Even though it is not possible, due to the present state of the text, to have a complete picture of Abhinavagupta's conception of *abhinaya*, relevant textual *loci* that could elucidate his standpoint on such a central topic are not lacking in the *Abhinavabhāratī*. In this perspective, the discussion about dance and *abhinaya* dealt with in the fourth chapter assumes a new relevance for the study of Abhinavagupta's 'missing' theory of representation.

Theatre is indeed a complex object made up of various elements which could be grouped into the three broad categories of representation (*abhinaya*), instrumental music (*vādyā*) and song (*gītā*), to which dance (*nṛtta*) is further added. These elements, which could also be taken as representatives of the various independent arts commingled into theatre, have

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distinction between the two arts, namely theatre (*nāṭya*) and dance (*nṛtta*), in the *Daśarūpaka* a tripartition of the scenic object into *nāṭya* (theatre), *nṛtya* ('mimetic' dance) and *nṛtta* ('pure' dance) is found for the first time. Among these, dance is defined as '*tālalayāśraya*-' (DR 1.9a), "based on rhythm and tempo". In the *Avaloka*, Dhanika comments: *tanmātrāpekṣo 'ṅgavikṣepo 'bhinayaśūnyo nṛttam iti* (AL ad DR 1.9a). "Dance is a throwing of limbs, devoid of representation, merely following those [elements such as rhythm and tempo]." The *Saṅgītaratnākara* of Śārṅgadeva (thirteenth century) generally follows quite closely the *Abhinavabhāratī*, but Śārṅgadeva presents the same tripartite object as the *Daśarūpaka*. Nonetheless, he defines dance in analogous terms: *gātravikṣepamātram tu sarvābhinayavarjitam || āṅgikoktaprakāreṇa nṛttaṃ nṛttavido viduḥ* | (SR 7.27b-28a) "The experts in dance however, know dance, consisting in a mere throwing of limbs devoid of all kind of representation, under the modality which has been stated with regard to the bodily representation."

<sup>18</sup> Representation (*abhinaya*), appears in all the definitions of theatre. In NS 1.119 theatre is defined as follows: *yo 'yam svabhāvo lokasya sukhaduḥkhasamanvitaḥ | so 'ṅgādyabhinayopeto nāṭyam ity abhidhīyate* || "This nature proper to the ordinary experience, associated with pleasure and pain, is called 'theatre' (*nāṭya*) in so far as it is endowed with a representation through the body, etc." According to the definition given by Dhanika, theatre "consists in a representation of the meaning of sentences" (*vākyārthābhinayātmaka*-) (AL ad DR 1.9a).

<sup>19</sup> It might be argued that the first chapter dealing with *abhinaya* should be considered the one on the states (*bhāvas*), the seventh, since in it the psycho-physical states (*sāttvikabhāvas*), which are part of the mindful representation (*sāttvikābhinaya*), are explained (NS 7.93-117). However, the *Abhinavabhāratī* on this chapter abruptly breaks off after the fourth verse. The missing portion in this chapter is part of the same *lacuna*, present in all the manuscripts examined so far, reaching up to the beginning of chapter nine.

<sup>20</sup> In ABh ad NS 4.61b-62a, vol. 1, p. 96, for instance, Abhinavagupta mentions a difference between dance and another element of representation, namely the *śākhā*, quotes NS 8.16 and announces further explanations on it, presumably in that same chapter. '*āṅgikaś ca bhavet chākhā*' ity uktam. '*aṅgahāravinīṣpannam nṛttaṃ tu karaṇāśrayam*' etat sphuṭam tatraiva vyākhyāsyata ity āstām tāvat. "The *śākhā* should be a bodily [representation]', it is said [in NS 8.16], 'but dance, produced by *aṅgahāras*, is based on *karaṇas*.' This will be clarified there (i.e. in the eighth chapter). So enough with it for the time being." Moreover, in ABh ad NS 14.2, vol. 2, p. 220-221, commenting on Bharata's reference to speech as the 'body of theatre', Abhinavagupta states: *eṣā hi tanur nāṭyasya sakalaprayogabhittibhūtatvenātodyagītābhinayānugrāhakatvāt svayam abhinayarūpatvā ca. pradarśitam caitad asmābhir upāṅgābhinayārambha eva*. "This (i.e. speech [*vāc*]), in fact, is the body of theatre because it supports instrumental music, song and representation by being the canvas for the entire performance and because it is itself [a kind of] representation. And this is what we explained at the very beginning of the [chapter on] representation [through] the minor limbs (*upāṅgābhinaya*) (i.e. NS ch. 8)."

to be organized and harmonized so that, even if they and their subcategories are perceived by different sense faculties, theatre can nevertheless be grasped, in the mind of the spectator, as a single unity. Once they have become limbs of the theatre, the various arts assume a purpose which is different from their own and, conceived by Abhinavagupta in their relation to *rasa* i.e. the emotional kernel of the play, they help to bring about the aesthetic experience.

I will not discuss here in details the importance attributed to *abhinaya* in connection to the arousal of the *rasa* in the spectator, or expatiate upon the relationship between emotions and their theatrical representation.<sup>21</sup> I will just briefly summarize Abhinavagupta's views on *abhinaya*, as far as it can serve the purpose of the present discussion. As already stated, Bharata explains *abhinaya* as that which brings (*nayati*) the meanings (*arthān*) in front of (*ābhimukhyam*) the spectators. While it is not immediately clear what the term '*artha*' refers to in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, in Abhinavagupta's theorization the represented meanings (*abhineyārtha*) can be the various *bhāvas*, and finally, even the *rasas*, which, even though not directly represented, have to be expressed by the performance.<sup>22</sup> Representation is what makes the theatrical meanings the object of an evident determinate cognition (*sphuṭādhyavasāya*), defined as a determination similar to a direct perception (*sākṣātkāra* *kalpānuyavasāya*),<sup>23</sup> since it brings the meanings to the direct presence –and this is the sense of the prefix *abhi-* glossed by *ābhimukhyam*– of the spectators. However, as Abhinavagupta will argue, representation alone is not enough to manifest the *rasa*.<sup>24</sup>

Instrumental and vocal music, on the other hand, are repeatedly said to provide variety, entertainment or attractiveness (all notions encompassed by the term '*uparañjaka*') to the performance. In the *pūrvapakṣa*, an argument is put forward for attributing a similar function to dance, but the opponent, eager to prove that dance and theatre are not different, argues that even under this perspective we cannot establish a function which would be specific to dance, resulting in a differentiation of the latter from theatre. In the case of vocal music, he says, songs are supposed to provide information about the type of character, the mood and the situation which are being represented, by supplying what is not explicitly stated in the dramatic text. Instrumental music, in turn, is said to enhance the rhythm.<sup>25</sup> While refuting this position,

<sup>21</sup> For a thorough evaluation of *abhinaya*, see Bansat-Boudon (1992: 145-155) and for a discussion about the representation of emotions in theatre in particular, see Ganser (2009).

<sup>22</sup> For *bhāva* and *rasa* as *abhineyārtha* see, especially, Ganser (2009: 77-78).

<sup>23</sup> In the gloss to the definition of theatre given in NŚ 1.119, vol. 1, p. 43, it is said that “since it is different from [objects which are] well known in the world as real, false, etc., the object of [the relative pronoun] *yat* [referring to ‘theatre’] is the content of a determination, similar to a direct perception, [having the form] ‘this’ (*ayam*).” (*ayam iti pratyakṣakalpānuyavasāyaviśayaḥ, lokaprasiddhasatyāsatyādivilakṣaṇatvāt yacchabdavācyaḥ*), and, a few lines below, that “the cognition [derived from the four-fold *abhinaya*] is similar to an evident direct perception” (*pratyakṣasākṣātkāra* *kalpā pratītiḥ*). The crucial role of *abhinaya* in creating such a special kind of cognition is stated on various occasions. For instance, see ABh ad NŚ 22.1, vol. 3, p. 150: *abhinayanaṁ hi cittavṛttisādhāraṇatāpattiprāṇasākṣātkāra* *kalpāpādhyavasāyasampādanam*. “Indeed, representation is the production of a determinate cognition similar to a direct perception, consisting in the occurring of the generalization of a mental mood.” Note that the two terms *adhyavasāya* and *anuyavasāya* are used interchangeably in the *Abhinavabhāratī* and that the latter does not hold here the specific sense it has in Nyāya. On *anuyavasāya* as the determination following the direct perception in the Pratyabhijñā, see Torella (2002: 100-102, and 158, n. 7).

<sup>24</sup> On this crucial point, see below the reasons behind the introduction of the *kaiśikī vṛtti*, n. 37.

<sup>25</sup> The text reads: *gītasya tāvat 'yat tu kāvyena noktaṁ syāt tad gītena prasādhayet' iti 'yāni vākyais tu na brūyāt' iti 'na tair eva tu vākyaṛthaiḥ' iti nyāyena prakṛticittavṛttikathāvasthādī sūcayato 'sty upayogaḥ. vādyasyāpi gītāsāmyākṣiptatāloddīpakatvena. etanmadhyāt tu nṛtaṁ karṣaṁ kam svabhāvam apekṣate?* (ABh ad NŚ 4.261b-263a, vol. 1, p. 173). “First of all, songs are used to suggest the character, [his] mental state, the situation in the story, etc., according to the following principle: ‘He should accomplish with a song that which is not said by the poem’ (untraced quotation), ‘those [things] which cannot be expressed in speech [should be illustrated through songs]’ and ‘not just by those sentence-meanings, [but by others, based on similitude]’ (NŚ 32.351). Instrumental music, on its part, is used to heighten the musical metre (*tāla*), introduced for the harmonisation of the song. Among these [elements such as vocal and instrumental music], however, what is the essence to which dance, as

Abhinavagupta corners his opponent by disclosing the flaws hidden in his reasoning. It is true that a function is easily attributable to music and songs within theatre, but this is possible only in so far as songs are endowed with a poetic text and music is connected to it, that is to say, only because their meaningful portion –the poetic text which is sung– may be seen as part of the vocal representation. But that is not what the entertaining or charming elements are really expected to achieve.<sup>26</sup> The opponent imprudently tries to adjust his position, but ultimately gets cornered:

[-The opponent argues:] “As [you] have previously said, that charming [element], which is the door of access into the heart for the multitude of meanings, [namely] the deeds, to be accepted or rejected, belonging [respectively to characters such as] Rāma or Rāvaṇa, is akin to a needle, since it has the quality of entering the heart spontaneously.” [-Abhinavagupta retorts:] “Then, this is exactly the use of dance (*nṛtta*) within theatre, that dance which, consisting of turns (*valanā*), revolutions (*vartanā*) and so forth, is internal to [theatre]. For specifically, since [theatre] is comparable to a circle of fire (*alātacakrapratimave*), without [dance] it could not be mentally grasped by the [spectators as such]. That is why theatre is like the thread which binds together the bracelet of the clear rubies of the [single] representations (*abhinaya*) [and,] due to [its] proximity [to dance] –[namely] the fact of being homogeneous to dance which consists of turning and so forth– theatre pervades [also] the songs etc. which form part [of it].”<sup>27</sup>

the subject (*kartr*) [of the second *pāda* in NŚ 4.262], conforms?” The same principle, whose source I haven’t been able to trace, is quoted in ABh ad NŚ 22.49, vol. 3, p. 173, with a slightly modified text: *yatra kāvyena noktaṃ syāt tat tu gītaṃ prasādhayet*. The context in which it appears makes it clear that the passage refers to the employment of a *dhruvā* song accompanied by its enactment. As L. Bansat-Boudon has pointed out, both the vocal and rhythmical parts in a song of the *dhruvā* type are subservient to the meaning expressed in the text which they are called to accomplish (Bansat-Boudon 1992: 383 and n. 448).

<sup>26</sup> In this respect, see Abhinavagupta’s mordacious remark at the end of the discussion in ABh ad NŚ 4.262b-263a, vol. 1, p. 178 : *dhruvāyās tu sampāṭhamātram evāstu. alaṃ varṇālaṃkārayojanātmakagānakriyādiprasārāyāsena*. “Then [if, as you maintain, songs are only meant to supply further information absent from the dramatic text], let the *dhruvā* just be read out, and let the effort [of the singers] in extending the activity of singing etc., which consists in applying tonal structures (*varṇa*) and ornaments (*alaṃkāra*), not be pursued any further.”

<sup>27</sup> ABh ad NŚ 4.262b-263a, vol. 1, p. 178: *nanu rāmarāvaṇādīgatagrāhyatyājyarūpacaritārthaḍambaraśya hṛdayānupraveśadvārahūtaṃ hṛdayaṃ tat sūcīkalpaṃ, svayaṃ hṛdayānupraveśītvād ity uktam prāk. sa eva tarhi nṛttasya valanāvartanāder antaraṅge ’sya nāṭya upayogaḥ. viśeṣato hi tadvinā ’lātacakrapratimave tair buddhigrāhyam eva nāṭyaṃ na syāt. tata eva vimalābhinayamāñikyagumphaividhāyisūtrasthānīyaṃ valanādirūpanṛttasajātīyatvān nikaṭatvād antaraṅgaḡitādivyāpi nāṭyam*. Compare also the French translation of this passage provided and discussed in Bansat-Boudon (1992: 403 and 62, n. 50): “Le charme qui permet de faire entrer dans les cœurs la foule des significations contenues dans ces conduites qu’il faut adopter ou rejeter selon qu’elles ressemblent à la conduite de Rāma ou à celle de Rāvaṇa, etc., n’est-il pas vrai, ainsi qu’on l’a dit précédemment, qu’il est semblable à une aiguille (*sūcīkalpa*), en raison même de sa capacité à pénétrer spontanément les cœurs ? Voilà précisément à quoi sert la danse, faite de *valanā*, de *vartanā*, etc., au sein du *nāṭya* : en effet, sans elle, il serait à l’image d’un cercle de feu (*alātacakra*) dont les (spectateurs) ne pourraient se saisir mentalement. Ainsi, la représentation (*nāṭya*) est pénétrée du chant, etc., qui est comme son âme puisqu’il est de la même espèce que la danse qui consiste en *valanā*, etc., et qu’il en est proche. C’est pourquoi elle ressemble à un fil tressant ensemble ces rubis [que sont le chant et la danse] avec l’éclatant *abhinaya*.” Differently from Lyne Bansat-Boudon, I translate ‘*hṛdya*’ as an adjective referring generally to an element which is charming (*hṛdya*), and in this particular case to song (*gīta*), since Abhinavagupta has mentioned it in the immediately preceding paragraph. ‘*Tad*’ could thus be taken as the subject of this sentence. For a similar occurrence of the term ‘*hṛdya*’ applied to different elements of theatre, see the long compound in ABh ad NŚ 1.107, vol. 1, p. 36: *°hṛdyavasturūpagītōdyapramadānubhavasamśkārasūcītasamanugatataduktārūparāmādhyaavasāyasamśkāra* (translated in Gnoli 1985: 97). More significantly, my translation differs as far as the interpretation of the compound ‘*alātacakrapratimave*’, a locative absolute with causal value, is concerned. In the French translation it is interpreted together with ‘*tadvinā*’ as the cause for the impossibility to mentally grasp theatre, which, in the absence of dance, is bound to remain as an *alātacakra*, while I tend to read ‘*tadvinā*’ with ‘*tair buddhigrāhyam eva nāṭyaṃ na syāt*’, that is with ‘*alātacakrapratimave*’ as the very condition for the impossibility to grasp a theatre bereft of dance. Both translations are syntactically possible; the reasons for my privileging the second



This crucial passage seals the commentary on the first part of the *siddhānta*, where Bharata states that “[...] dance does not conform to any meaning at all” (NŚ 4.263b), and provides a sort of introduction to the next line, where a positive assessment of the function of dance is provided: “but it can generate beauty (*śobhā*), that is why it has come into use” (NŚ 4.264a). Ideally, one can divide the quoted passage in two parts. In the first section, the purpose of dance is stated in relation to that of theatre as appearing in the theoretical frame outlined by Abhinavagupta, namely in a reception perspective, while in the second part –the one that starts with ‘*viśeṣato hi*’ etc.– its practical functioning among the elements of theatre, seen in a larger performance perspective, is presented. Broadly speaking, these two lines of reasoning will set the boundaries for the present discussion, before we come to some conclusions. The second aspect will be privileged here, since it has been less explored in the field of theatre studies.<sup>28</sup> Particular attention will be given to the discussion of the image of the fire-wheel, which is seen to provide a key to the interpretation of the role of dance within the theatrical performance, encompassing both the production and the reception process.<sup>29</sup>

## 2. Dance as a charming element of the performance

As he has done systematically with all the elements of theatre, Abhinavagupta implicitly relates the function of dance to his aesthetic theory. The twofold aim of theatre has been stated in the *Abhinavabhāratī* as consisting of instruction (*vyutpattī*) accompanied by pleasure (*prīti*).<sup>30</sup> The appropriate display of the deeds of Rāma and Rāvaṇa on stage results in an instruction for the spectators about the moral value of action. In this perspective, however, it is said that dance is just the door of access to meaning. In other words, dance itself does not say anything about the actions represented on stage, whether they should be accepted or rejected.

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interpretation will be substantiated in details below. The reading “*rāmarāvaṇādīgatagrāhyatāyājarūpacaritārthaḍambarasya*”, adopted here, is Dvivedī’s (ABh3, vol. 1, p. 413). Kavi reads instead “*rāmarāvaṇādīgata(tā)grāmyatāyājarūpacaritārthaḍambarasya*” (vol. 1, p. 178).

<sup>28</sup> Regarding the first part of the analysis, the words put into the mouth of the objector will be treated as Abhinavagupta’s own, since they refer to statements attributed to the commentator himself, as indicated by the expression ‘*ity uktam prāk*’ (‘As [you] have previously said’).

<sup>29</sup> The importance of the excerpt under discussion was already pointed out by J.L. Masson and M.V. Patwardhan: “Commenting on the fourth Adhyāya, Abhinava has an obscure passage which seems to contain a very important idea. Abhinava uses the famous Buddhist analogy of the fire brand: if there is no movement, we do not see a wheel. It is only when the fire- brand is rapidly revolved that we see a steady wheel of fire. In the same way, Abhinava seems to be saying, until the actors dance and sing, i.e. set the play into motion, it is not really a ‘drama’.” (1970: 34 and n. 283). As it will be demonstrated, such explanation of dance together with music is not satisfactory: neither it takes into account the first part of the passage, nor does it properly seize the significance of the *alātacakra* metaphor in this specific context.

<sup>30</sup> The twofold aim of theatre never appears as such in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. In ABh ad NŚ 1.11, vol. 1, p. 11, it first appears in connection to the two sense faculties by which theatre is grasped, hearing and sight, which make theatre different, say, from poetry. To the audibility of poetry, theatre adds in fact visibility, which is connected by Abhinavagupta to pleasure (*prīti*). In NŚ 1.11 the gods ask Brahmā for “an object of diversion, which should be visible as well as audible” (*krīḍanīyakam icchāmo dr̥śyam śravyaṃ ca yad bhavet* ||), on which Abhinavagupta comments: *dr̥śyam iti hr̥dyam śravyaṃ iti vyutpattipradam iti pr̥tivyutpattidam ity arthaḥ*. “‘Visible’ means charming, ‘audible’ means instructive. Hence [theatre] bestows pleasure and instruction.” In ABh ad NŚ 6, prose after 31, vol. 1, p. 271, pleasure and instruction are explicitly stated as the twofold purpose of theatre, connected to *rasa*: *taṃ vinārthaḥ prayojanaṃ pr̥tipuraḥsaram vyutpattimayaṃ na pravartate*. “Without it (i.e. the *rasa*) the aim, i.e. the purpose, consisting of instruction accompanied by pleasure, is not achieved.”

In contrast to actions that have some practical purpose, the action of dance is described in ABh ad NŚ 4.30 merely in terms of movement. The basic units of dance, called *karaṇas* and canonised in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* as a hundred and eight in total,<sup>31</sup> are described by Abhinavagupta in the following terms:

*Karaṇa* means ‘action’. Of what is it an action? Of dance, which is a playful throwing of limbs. That is to say: *karaṇa* is the action of [dance], which is different from actions concerning [things] to be rejected or accepted [...] The meaning is: a *karaṇa* is a single action [performed] by quitting contact with the precedent place, extending up to the attainment of a different place that is suitable. In fact, an action has in every case its conclusion in a subsequent contact, and this very desired subsequent contact is well-known in the world as the conclusion of the action, this is nothing new. [But still,] in [dance], there is something more, namely playfulness, on account of the introduction of beauty.<sup>32</sup>

As the gloss of the term ‘*karaṇa*’ by ‘*kriyā*’ suggests, dance is, broadly speaking, an action, and it is described here as a movement, similar to walking and so forth, devoid of any further expectations outside itself. This amounts to saying that dance is different from theatre, which, on the contrary, results in an instruction about what to do and what to avoid.<sup>33</sup>

The prerequisite for the spectator to adhere to the meanings represented and thus obtain an instruction from the play is charm, since, it is argued, the elements endowed with this quality spontaneously pierce the heart. Such is said to be the use of dance as internal to theatre, that is, of dance not just seen as an independent art, such as the one displayed in the preliminary rite. So far, in the perspective outlined above, that of the twofold purpose of theatre, the equation ‘dance’= ‘pleasure’ (*prīti* as leading to *vyutpatti*) could appear a quite straightforward one.<sup>34</sup> However, this quite superficial interpretation is invalidated by the following statement: “Dance, in fact, is not performed with the intention: ‘the spectators should be pleased or instructed’. But rather, [pleasure and instruction] may be attained since [dance] is invariably connected [to them].”<sup>35</sup> While pleasure, just like instruction, is something to be actively sought after as an effect of the performance on the spectator, already implicit in the dramatic material, charm is more akin to a quality inherent in some elements of the performance, whose main aim may not necessarily be to please. Dance, indeed, is not used with the aim of pleasing somebody, but it is pleasant in itself (and this could be, I believe, the sense of the word ‘*svayam*’ in the passage translated in §1, namely in the expression *svayaṃ hrdayānupraveśitvād*).

The idea that the meanings are expressed through representation but that, in order to

<sup>31</sup> These hundred and eight *karaṇas* are represented in the sculpted dance-postures in the bas-reliefs of some of the renowned temples of Tamil Nadu, as well as in Indonesia.

<sup>32</sup> ABh ad NŚ 4.30, vol. 1, pp. 10-11: *kriyā karaṇam. kasya kriyā? nṛttasya gātrāṇāṃ vilāsakṣepasya. heyopādeyaviṣayakriyādibhyo vyatiriktā yā tatkriyā karaṇam ity arthaḥ. [...] pūrvakṣetrasaṃyogatyāgena samucitakṣetrāntaraprāptiparyantatayā ekā kriyā tat karaṇam ity arthaḥ. uttarasaṃyogāntaṃ hi sarvatra karma. sa cāpy abhilaṣitottarasaṃyoga eva kriyāvadhitvena loke prasiddha iti nāpūrvam etat. etāvad evehādihikaṃ saundaryānupraveśena savilāsatvaṃ nāma.*

<sup>33</sup> ABh ad NŚ 1.119, vol. 1, p. 45 : *tena heyopādeyavyutpattiḥ phalam.* “Therefore, the result [of theatre] is an instruction about what has to be avoided and what has to be followed.”

<sup>34</sup> The question about the priority of *vyutpatti* with respect to *prīti* is indeed debated, since the statements contained in both the *Dhvanyālokalocana* and the *Abhinavabhāratī* appear at first sight somehow contradictory. I have indeed chosen to translate ‘*puraḥsara-*’ in the expression ‘*prītipuraḥsaraṃ vyutpattimayaṃ*’ (see n. 30) with the somewhat neutral expression ‘accompanied by’, instead of adopting the more literal translation ‘preceded by’, in order to leave, intentionally, the ambiguity. An exhaustive analysis of the question of *prīti* and *vyutpatti* as the twofold purpose of theatre is beyond the scope of this paper, and it has been already approached by others, for instance Ingalls (1990).

<sup>35</sup> ABh ad NŚ 4.261b-263, vol. 1, p. 177: *na hi sāmājikāḥ prīyantāṃ vyutpadyantāṃ vetyabhisamdhinā nṛttaprayogaḥ. tatsaṃpattis tu nāntariyakatvād bhavatu.*

arrive at the *rasa*, charm or beauty are required, has been clearly expressed by Abhinavagupta in the first chapter of his commentary, where dance makes its first appearance in the body of theatre as part of the ‘gorgeous manner’ (*kaiśikī vṛtti*). The gorgeous manner, containing elements of dance as well as instrumental and vocal music, is added by Bharata following the suggestion of Brahmā to the already existent material. This includes the three manners called the ‘vocal’ (*bhāratī*), the ‘psycho-physical’ (*sāttvatī*) and the ‘dynamic’ (*ārabhaṭī*), which emphasize in turn the speech element, the mental element and the physical one. Abhinavagupta defines the *kaiśikī* as a ‘heart-catching multifariousness’ (*hṛdayahāri vaicitryam*),<sup>36</sup> necessary for the manifestation not only of the *śṛṅgāra rasa* –quite intuitively connected to beautifying elements such as dance– but even for all the other *rasas*. Without such a beautiful multifariousness, representation cannot be the cause of the manifestation of *rasa*, as it would not appeal to the spectator.<sup>37</sup>

The first part of the passage could hence be interpreted in the light of these remarks. Through representation, the meanings are brought to the presence of the spectator, but, for the spectator to adhere to them, beautifying elements are required. This is indeed the use of dance as an element of theatre, a use which can be attributed to vocal and instrumental music as well.<sup>38</sup> It appears, however, that along with such a general use as a charming element, Abhinavagupta suggests another function specific to dance alone.

### 3. Dance and Representation in the image of the fire-wheel

Theatre is an entity made up of different art forms such as dance, songs, instrumental music and representation, which, when properly combined, make up a unitary image, grasped by the spectator through a single mental act. The preoccupation with the unity of theatre is referred to again and again in the *Abhinavabhāratī*,<sup>39</sup> and its problematic cognition is addressed

<sup>36</sup> ABh ad NŚ 1.44, vol. 1, p. 21: *brahmaṇā tūpadeśasamaye vacanamātreṇoktam etanmadhye hṛdayahāri vaicitryam yojanīyam iti*. “However, at the time of teaching, it has just been mentioned by Brahmā that this heart-catching multifariousness had to be added in the middle of the [performance].” (translation slightly modified from Cuneo 2008-2009).

<sup>37</sup> ABh ad NŚ 1.44-45, vol. 1, p. 22: [...] *tan nātyoktaśṛṅgāraraṣaḥ sambhavati, nānyathā. [...] tena śṛṅgārābhivyaktihetau sukumāre caturvidhe ’py abhinaye yojite madhuramantharavalanāvartanābhrūḥṣepakaṭākṣādīnā vinā śṛṅgāraraṣāsvādasya nāmāpi na bhavati. [...] raudrādirasābhivyaktāv api kartavyāyām yo ’bhinaya upādīyate so ’py anuprāsavalanāvartanādyātmakasundaravaicitryasyāmiśraṇayā duḥśliṣṭo ’śliṣṭa eva vā na rasābhivyaktihetur bhavātīti sarvatraiva kaiśikī prāñāḥ*. “[...] then [from the gorgeous manner] springs the *śṛṅgāra rasa* expressed in theatre, and not in any other manner. [...] Therefore, even if the four means of representation (*abhinaya*) which are the cause of the manifestation of *śṛṅgāra [rasa]* are employed in the delicate mode (*sukumāra*), without sweet and indolent turns and revolutions, without stretches of eyebrows, sidelong glances, etc. one cannot even mention the relish of *śṛṅgāra rasa*, [let alone experience it!]. [...] Even if one has to bring about the manifestation of [other] *rasas* such as *raudra*, etc., the employed representation is not the cause of the manifestation of the *rasas*, since it is hardly alluring or completely non-alluring if it is not commingled with the beautiful multifariousness [of the gorgeous manner] consisting in alliterations, turns, revolutions, etc. Therefore, in every possible case [i.e., for every *rasa*], the gorgeous (*kaiśikī*) [manner] is the vital essence [of the representation].” (translation based on Cuneo 2008-2009).

<sup>38</sup> For the complex process by which instruction is produced and for the operation of the charming elements within it see ABh ad NŚ 1.107, vol. 1, pp. 35-38, translated in Gnoli (1985: 96-98). For their functioning as removing one of the obstacles to the cognition of *rasa*, see below.

<sup>39</sup> In the first chapter see, for instance, ABh ad NŚ 1.51b-53a, vol. 1, p. 24: *nṛtagītātodyābhinayānām sām̐yasiddhyartham ekībhāvena sammelanaṁ prakṛtya prayogaḥ kārya iti darśayati*. “[Bharata] shows that the performance has to be brought about after commingling together dance, vocal music, instrumental music and

in the first chapter: “If the [various] ancillaries [of theatre] are performed simultaneously, how is it possible to have a cognition of theatre as one, as it is impossible to be simultaneously aware [of objects] perceived by different sensory faculties? In addition, if [they are] performed in succession, it is even more problematic [to cognise theatre as one]. Therefore, how is the performance possible?”<sup>40</sup>

Considerations of a similar order certainly match well with a spectator-centred aesthetics like the one developed by Abhinavagupta. Despite this, the attempt at finding unity beyond multiplicity is already present in Bharata, though its purpose is not made explicit. The nature of the theatrical performance as a single whole encompassing its parts is explained in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* through the image of the fire-wheel (*alātacakra*). In NŚ 28.7, Bharata says: “In this way, theatre practitioners should make songs, music and drama, having different bases, similar to a fire-wheel.”<sup>41</sup>

The example of the fire-wheel (*alātacakra*) produced by the quick rotation of a firebrand (*alāta*) has been extensively exploited in the literature of South Asia,<sup>42</sup> and has been given different shades of meaning by the exponents of the various speculative traditions who have made use of it. In the grammatical tradition for instance, the *alātacakra* image is used to describe the nature of an action. Just as the fire-wheel corresponds, in fact, to the points in time and space touched by the revolving brand, an action is actually composed of innumerable micro-actions, but it is conceived by the intellect as a single and unitary idea.<sup>43</sup>

Similarly conceived, theatre is a composite art which seeks to create a unitary image in the mind of the spectator. In the *Abhinavabhāratī*, Abhinavagupta makes use of the fire-wheel image to describe different but related phenomena. Starting from Bharata’s employment of it, in its broadest and most patent application to the discontinuity of the elements of theatre enveloped by a whole image, Abhinavagupta situates it in the realm of cognition, without withdrawing the attention from the production of the theatrical machinery, requiring an effort from its practitioners. He says, commenting on Bharata’s statement:

Since [theatre] is based on various [elements], i.e. has the form of various actions grasped by different organs of perception, its unity must be produced by [theatre practitioners] through an effort, by means of which it may become, for the spectator, the object of a single cognition. For in reality, a spark of the flame of a firebrand cannot be connected simultaneously to several points in space. However, just as [the fire-wheel] is brought to homogeneity through an effort [to achieve] speed, so is also the performance. For similarly, [the performance] does not consist in

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representation, through [their] unification aimed at achieving the harmonisation [of all the parts].”

<sup>40</sup> ABh ad NŚ 1.5, vol. 1, p. 7: *yadi yugapad aṅgāni prayujyante, tad bhinnākṣagrāhyeṣu yugapatsamvedanābhāvāt katham ekaṃ nāṭyam iti pratipattiḥ? kramaprayoge ’pi nitarām. tasmāt katham prayoga iti* (translation based on Cuneo 2008-2009).

<sup>41</sup> NŚ 28.7: *evam gānaṃ ca vādyam ca nāṭyam ca vividhāśrayam | alātacakrapratimaṃ kartavyam nāṭyayoktrbhiḥ ||* It is quite likely that with this statement Bharata had in mind, apart from the unification of the disparate elements of theatre, also the unity of theatre as appearing in the cognition of the spectator. In this respect, see also Bansat-Boudon 1992: 62. As it will be shown below, even in different contexts the image of the *alātacakra* is invariably related to the cognitive act grasping it.

<sup>42</sup> For references about early occurrences of *alāta* and *alātacakra* see Bouy (2000: 255-256). Schmithausen (1965: 149) reports an early articulate description of the formation of an *alātacakra* in Candrakīrti’s *Catuhśatakavṛtti*: *yathā sajjvalanasya indhanasya āśu bhrāmyamāṇasya tadgatadarśanaviparyāsanibandhanatvāc cakrākāropalabdhir bhavati [...]*. “Just as an inflamed fire-brand quickly revolving is apprehended with the shape of a circle, since it depends on a mistaken vision of that [fire-brand], [...]” (translation mine).

<sup>43</sup> See Bhartṛhari’s *Vākyapadīya* 3.8.7-8: *yathā gaur iti saṃghātaḥ sarvo nendriyagocaraḥ | bhāgaśas tūpalabdhasya buddhau rūpaṃ nirūpyate || indriyair anyathā prāptau bhedaśōpanipātibhiḥ | alātacakravat rūpaṃ kriyāṇāṃ parikalpyate ||* “The entire group [of phonemes forming] the word ‘cow’ cannot [simultaneously] be the object of the senses, but [although] it is apprehended part by part, its form is determined in the intellect. Likewise, the form of the actions is imagined [in the intellect] like the form of a fire-wheel, even if it is grasped differently by the senses rushing towards the parts of differentiation.” (translation mine).

one single action, but it can be produced in the same way [as the fire-wheel] through an effort aimed at achieving an harmonisation [of its different parts]. Therefore, [Bharata] says that this [theatrical performance] is ‘similar to a fire-wheel’.<sup>44</sup>

The three basic elements singled out by Bharata as song (*gāna*), instrumental music (*vādyā*) and theatre (*nāṭya*) actually stand for the various means of performance appointed to three different groups of practitioners. The first group, that of the singers, along with the players of stringed and wind instruments, is responsible for the melodic part. The second, to which the drummers belong, for the rhythmical part, and the last, formed by the actors, is responsible for the representation.<sup>45</sup> In theatre, these three groups should function interdependently, but even in isolation, each group is responsible for the harmonisation of its peculiar means of performance, forming in itself a complex unity. Each of these ensembles has to produce through an effort the image of a fire-wheel. In the case of the third group, this image has been adopted by Abhinavagupta in the chapter on the harmonious representation (*sāmānyābhinaya*), in which the rules for the simultaneous functioning of the four means of representation and for the organic temporal succession of the various blends of representative devices are laid down.<sup>46</sup>

Analogously, the same should apply to each of the three elements, and not to *abhinaya* exclusively. Whence Abhinavagupta continues:

When it is brought to unity by force of representation, the homogeneous representation (*sāmānyābhinaya*) is said to form a single group (*rāśi*). There is no disagreement about this. But also the group responsible for the melody, commingled together [in its various parts], has to be made similar to a fire-wheel. The regulation of the orchestra, having in its turn various bases, i.e. concerning [different elements] such as the *vīṇā*, the flute and the singer, has to be [similarly] brought to unity. Therefore, all the three [groups] have to be made into a lump then. That is why what is said [in the verse, i.e. in NS 28.7] is tenable.<sup>47</sup>

If such a unitary image, whose unifying process has been shown to function on multiple levels, represents, despite its ultimately illusory nature, the very condition for grasping the reality of theatre, or, in the grammarian’s version, an operational device for describing the functioning of language, in many philosophical systems the very illusory character of such a perception has been commonly regarded in negative terms.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>44</sup> This is a tentative translation of ABh ad NS 28.7, vol. 4, p. 4, which appears to be a highly corrupt text: *yasmād vividhāśrayaṃ bhinnendriyagrāhyavividhakriyārūpam, tasmād yatnenāsyaiikatā tatsampādya, yenaikabuddhiviśayatā sāmājikasya gacchet. alātatejaḥkaṇo hi na vastuto yugapad anekadeśasambandhī. lāghavayatnena tu tathātathā (yathā) sāmāyam āpāditam, evaṃ prayogo ’pi. tathāpi (tathā hi) naikakriyātmā, sāmāyāpādanāya...(ya)tnena tu tathā sampādita ity etad āha ’alātacakrapratimam’ iti* (the words in brackets are my suggestions for emending the text).

<sup>45</sup> The three ensembles (*kutapa*), described immediately before the ‘fire-wheel’ passage in NS 28.3-6, are called, respectively, ‘*tatakutapa*’ (‘the ensemble of the stringed instruments’), ‘*avanaddhakutapa*’ (‘the ensemble of the covered instruments’) and ‘*nāṭyakutapa*’ (‘the ensemble of theatre’). As N. Ramanathan puts it: “It is clear from the above statement [i.e. NS 28.7] that *gāna* refers to the melodic element contributed by the *tatakutapa*, *vādyā* to the rhythmic structures created by the *avanaddhakutapa* and *nāṭya* to the histrionic element contributed by the *nāṭyakutapa*.” (Ramanathan 1999: 3; square brackets mine).

<sup>46</sup> For the use of the *alātacakra* image in the chapter on *sāmānyābhinaya* see ABh ad NS 22.45-46. For a comprehensive study of the *sāmānyābhinaya* see Bansat-Boudon (1989-90 and 1992: 341-387).

<sup>47</sup> ABh ad NS 28.7, vol. 4, p. 4: *sāmānyābhinaye ’bhinayabalād ekatvaṃ nūta eko rāśir iti nātra vivādaḥ. svaragatarāśiś cānyonyasaṃmilito ’lātacakravat kāryaḥ. vividhāśrayo ’pi vīṇāvaṃśagātrādigato ’pi vādyavidhir ekībhāvaṃ neya iti trayāṇām apy atha grāsikaraṇam iti yuktam uktam.*

<sup>48</sup> Along with the ‘two moons’, ‘the moving trees’ the ‘silver in the mother-of pearl’, etc., the *alātacakra* is a stock example of perceptual error, variously analyzed in the different *darśanas*. The most complete study on error in the various philosophical schools is Schmithausen (1965). For reference to Abhinavagupta’s conception of error, see

In the *Āgamaśāstra* of Gauḍapāda, the image of the *alāta* is developed in six verses [ĀŚ 4.47-52], where the various trajectories created by the moving firebrand stand as a metaphor for the illusory movement of consciousness (*viññānaspanda*) appearing as fragmented into an act of perception (*grahaṇa*) and a perceiver (*grāhaka*).<sup>49</sup> Without entering into Gauḍapāda's philosophical tenets, nevermind the possible origin of this example in a Madhyamaka *milieu*, as some have suggested, it is quite evident that the *alātacakra* stands here for the illusory character of reality as it appears in the perceptive act.

If, in Gauḍapāda's metaphor, one is expected to overcome appearance to arrive at reality, in theatre it is quite the opposite: illusion has to be accepted in order to attain a unitary perception of the theatrical reality. To be more precise, it is the very judgement of a cognition according to the criterion of truthfulness and falsity that has to be suppressed. One could well imagine the consequences if the spectator, eager to unmask the theatrical device, would make the attempt to recognise one of his friends in the actor impersonating some given character, or, with a contemporary example, if someone watching a horror movie would start wondering at the brand of ketchup being used in a scene involving the presence of blood. This suspension of judgement is provided by the special cognition one has of theatre in general and of the character in particular, as neither real nor unreal, defined as a determinate cognition (*anuvyavasāya* or *adhyavasāya*) similar to an evident direct perception (*pratyakṣasākṣātkāra*). It is, indeed, in order to compose such a unitary image that the actors have to unfold all their skills in the means of representation.

Two opposite trends are at play in the process which triggers the relishing of *rasa* for the spectator, the real protagonist of the aesthetic experience: the first operates by distancing from the events represented, the other entangles and accounts for the spectator's adherence to the same events. This two-fold tension, which alone can provoke an aesthetic experience, is then threatened by a series of obstacles which would invalidate the production of *rasa*.<sup>50</sup> In this perspective, the fourfold representation (*abhinaya*), along with the other elements of 'realism' or worldly convention (*lokadharmī*), is prescribed in order to eliminate the obstacle consisting in the 'lack of vividness' (*sphuṭatvābhāva*). Sticking to the primacy of direct perception over the other means of valid knowledge, Abhinavagupta maintains that even when we are perceiving something illusory, such as a fire-wheel, our perception can be invalidated only through a more forceful direct perception, subsequent to it.<sup>51</sup> Even if it may be quite evident

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Rastogi (1986) and Isabelle Ratié's remarks on *bhrānti* in the present volume. For error in the *Pratyabhijñā* system, see Torella (2002: 171), where the most common example of silver in the mother-of-pearl is dealt with (*Īśvarapratyabhijñāṅkārikā* II, 3, 13 and *Vṛtti* thereupon), and Nemec (2012).

<sup>49</sup> ĀŚ 4.47: *ṛjuvagrādikābhāsam alātaspaṇḍitaṃ yathā | grahaṇagrāhakābhāsaṃ viññānaspanditaṃ tathā ||* "De même que le mouvement d'un brandon ardent (*alāta*) a une apparence droite, courbe, etc., de même le mouvement de la Conscience (*viññāna*) a l'apparence de la saisie et du sujet saisissant." (translated in Bouy 2000: 254).

<sup>50</sup> On the obstacles and the way to remove them, see Gnoli 1985: 62-78.

<sup>51</sup> ABh ad *rasasūtra*, vol. 1, p. 281: *sphuṭapratīṭikāriśabdaliṅgasambhave 'pi na pratītir viśrāmyati, sphuṭapratīṭirūpapratyakṣocitapratyayasākāṅkṣatvāt, yathāhuḥ 'sarvā ceyaṃ pramitiḥ pratyakṣaparā' iti, svasākṣātkṛta āgamānumānaśatair apy ananyathābhāvasya svasaṃvedanāt, alātacakrādau sākṣātkārāntareṇaiva balavatā tadavadhāraṇād iti laukikas tāvad ayaṃ kramaḥ. tasmāt tadubhayaviḥnaviḥghāte 'bhinayā lokadharmīvr̥ttipravṛtṭyupaskṛtāḥ samabhiṣicyante. abhinayanaṃ hi saśabdaliṅgavyāpāravisadṛśam eva pratyakṣavyāpārakalpam iti niśceṣyamaḥ.* "Even though an inferential sign or a speech unit provoking a vivid cognition might be present, cognition does not come to rest [in them] because of the expectancy for a proper cognition, i.e. a direct perception consisting of a vivid cognition, as [Vātsyāyana] has said [in the *Bhāṣya* ad *Nyāyasūtra* 1.1.3]: "All valid knowledge culminates in direct perception," because in the case of what [we] directly perceive in ourselves, [we know through] self-awareness that it cannot be otherwise despite hundreds of authoritative statements and inferences, [and finally] because even in the case of a fire-wheel etc., the [real state of things] is ascertained only by means of another forceful direct perception. This is indeed the ordinary sequence. Therefore, the means of representation, enhanced by the worldly convention, the manners and the local usages, are consecrated to the elimination of these two obstacles. Representing (*abhinayana*), in fact, is different from the

that the representation should aim at creating a unitary and coherent image, one must not forget that this image has been given the status of an *alātacakra*. The spectator is indeed well aware that what he is witnessing is not the ordinary reality. He has in fact already taken a distance from the events represented in occasion of the *pūrvaraṅga*, where all the spectacular elements were displayed in front of him and the identity of the actor was revealed.<sup>52</sup>

Furthermore, another obstacle is seen in the fact that the spectator may not be able to rest his mind on something else, namely on the spectacular object, or, the fire-wheel image, since he may be overwhelmed by his own sensations of pleasure, pain etc. The means for eliminating this obstacle consists in the display of charming elements such as music and songs, damsels, and –I deem one could add with a certain degree of certainty– dance, which, says Abhinavagupta, are capable to turn even an unrefined person (*ahṛdaya*) into a refined spectator (*sahṛdaya*).<sup>53</sup>

Roughly, three stages could be identified in provoking this ‘detached-cum-involved’ quality proper to the aesthetic cognition: starting from a position of detachment the spectator is initially allowed to see the fire-brand and the hand holding it. Then, the fire-brand begins to turn, that is, the various single representations are displayed and the image of the fire-wheel is formed. The next stage corresponds to the turning of the spectator towards the illusory image, and thus to an adherence to the meanings represented, operated by the charming elements.<sup>54</sup>

Now that a possible aesthetic function of dance within theatre has been identified, its relationship to the *alātacakra* image, as given in the second part of the obscure passage under consideration, remains to be interpreted. In theatre, the cognition of the real state of things has no importance. It does not matter if the image provided by the revolving fire-brand is illusory. As long as the circle is perceived as unitary and the stick is unseen, the image has validity in the mind of the spectator who grasps it. I believe that the issue at stake here is definitely the creation of the cognition of theatre as a unitary and ordered entity from disparate and

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operations involving an inferential sign or a speech unit, but it is almost like the operation of perception. We will establish this later on.” (translation modified from Cuneo 2008-2009). On this same passage, compare also the translation in Gnoli (1985: 68-70). Raniero Gnoli translates the expression ‘*iti laukikas tāvad ayaṃ kramah*’ as “This is quite an ordinary process”. I agree with Daniele Cuneo’s translation “This is indeed the ordinary sequence”, since I believe, as it will become clear later on, that the process by which a direct perception, such as that of a fire-wheel, can be invalidated only by a more forceful perception, subsequent in time, is the one proper to the ordinary experience. In theatre, on the contrary, different dynamics between cognitions are at play.

<sup>52</sup> Such a revelation, taking place for instance in the prologue (*prastāvanā*) to the play where the producer engages in dialogue with an assistant or an actor, has the important consequence that both the actor and the character are negated, so that the character attains an ambiguous status, neither real nor unreal. In the economy of the obstacles, the preliminary rite, along with the ‘fantastic’ elements or theatrical convention (*nāṭyadharmī*) and the actor’s disguise are said to eliminate ‘the immersion in temporal and spatial determinations perceived as exclusively one’s own or exclusively those of another’. For a discussion and a translation of the passage summed up here, see Gnoli (1985: 64-67).

<sup>53</sup> ABh ad *rasasūtra*, vol. 1, p. 281: *nijasukhādivivaśībhūtaś ca katham vastvantare saṃvidaṃ viśrāmayed iti tatpratyūhavyapohanāya pratipadārthanīṣṭhaiḥ sādharāṇyamahimnā sakalabhogyatvasahiṣṇubhiḥ śabdādiviṣayamayair ātodyagānavicitramaṇḍapapadavidagdhaṇikādibhir uparañjanam samāśritam, yenāhṛdayo ’pi hṛdayavaimalyaprāptyā saḥṛdayīkriyate*. “Moreover, how could someone who is under the sway of his own pleasure, etc. make his consciousness rest on another object? In order to remove such an impediment, [Bharata] has resorted to the charm due to vocal and instrumental music, well-adorned playhouses, courtesans skilful in eloquence and so on, means made of phonic elements and so forth, arranged separately, liable to be enjoyed by all the [spectators] thanks to the power of generality. Thanks to all these means, even a person devoid of any sensibility becomes a connoisseur by obtaining a limpidity of the heart.” (translation in Cuneo 2008-2009).

<sup>54</sup> I am aware that this schematic picture is bound to involve a high degree of imprecision and simplification. For instance, the apparent temporal sequence of the three phases identified here is not to be taken as such, given that the charming elements such as singing, music and dance, present at some points in the play, are operative since the preliminary rite, where they have indeed a prominent role. In this phase of the performance, however, considerations of a different order from the present ones, issuing from a purely aesthetic perspective, should apply as well. These, however, are bound to be excluded from the present article.

inhomogeneous elements, since all the occurrences for the *alātacakra* image examined up to now appear to point to such a difficulty rather than to the fact that, since theatre is created as a fire-wheel image, it is impossible to grasp.<sup>55</sup>

Another occurrence of the same image in the ninth chapter of the *Abhinavabhāratī*, which treats hand-gestures, might provide some further evidence to this interpretation. In it, dance is more directly related to the *alātacakra* image. The context in which the passage is found is the following: after the description of the hand-gestures commonly used for representing (*abhinayahasta*), along with their application to specific meanings, a separate group of hand-gestures is described, called hand-gestures for dance (*nṛttahasta*). Since these hand-gestures do not represent anything, their treatment in one of the chapters devoted to representation appears quite unnatural. One would have expected to find them, instead, in the chapter devoted to dance, namely the fourth one. The commentator feels obliged to give an explanation for this fact and says:

In order to show that these hand-gestures for representing (*abhinayahasta*) are similar to a fire-wheel since, through the removal of accidents, [they] enter a single course [of performance] (*ekavartanānupraveśa*), and in order to reveal [the] restfulness [of the various representations] in a single sentence meaning, since it is in [their] nature to [follow] a course [sometimes] smooth [sometimes] bumpy, [...] [Bharata] designates the thing to be qualified by the word ‘*nṛtta*’ (dance), with [the words] ‘*nṛttahastān* etc.’<sup>56</sup>

In my understanding of this passage, dance provides the necessary link between the various single representations, so as to encompass the whole performance. However, one should not be misled and imagine that each representation, intended as a unitary scene, had to be necessarily linked to the following by means of a ‘danced *intermezzo*’. Even though it is possible that moments of dance were present in the play, as one can gather from the available specimens of Sanskrit drama, where scenes of dance are certainly seen as integrated into the plot, I would not overemphasise the presence of dance in theatre. It seems to me that Abhinavagupta’s analysis is more subtle and is meant to operate within the smallest significant

<sup>55</sup> This is the interpretation of ABh ad NS̐ 4.262b-263a proposed by Lyne Bansat-Boudon (see n. 27), according to which dance would provide the spectator with some pauses in the representation, since he would otherwise be unable to grasp the sense, “sens que le continuum théâtral entraînait trop rapidement loin de lui” (Bansat-Boudon, 1992: 403). “Aussi convient-il [...] d’interrompre de temps à autre le lent tournolement de ce cercle de feu que doit être la représentation afin que soit évité le vertige qu’il susciterait immanquablement et qui serait tout le contraire d’un enchantement. [...] La danse, explique l’*Abhinavabhāratī*, a pour vocation de ménager ces pauses nécessaires, [...]” (ibid., 63). Although it is true that the aesthetic process ultimately requires a rest on one’s own Self (*svātmaviśrānti*) when it reaches its climax, that is when the cognition is devoid of obstacles, I believe that at least as far as the passages under scrutiny are concerned, Abhinavagupta’s preoccupation is still with the building of the special cognition of the theatrical object, in which theatre has to be *really* grasped like an *alātacakra*, that is, as a single, even though illusory, unitary object.

<sup>56</sup> ABh ad NS̐ 9.11-17, vol. 2, p. 27: *eteṣāṃ tv abhinayahastānām chidracchādanenaikavartanānupraveśād alātacakrapratimatāṃ darśayitum, masṛṇoddhataavartanātmakatayā caikavākyaṛthaviśrāntatāṃ prathayitum, [...] nṛttaśabdena viśeṣyaṃ nirdiśati nṛttahastān ityādinā*. The other editions give at this point a slightly different, more elaborate, text: *eteṣāṃ tv abhinayahastānām alātacakrapratimatāṃ darśayitum, mārgāṇāṃ masṛṇoddhatachidravartanātmakatayā masṛṇatādinivṛttaye vālukotkṣepaṇena uddhatotsāraṇena chidracchādanena caikavartanānupraveśavad ekābhineyārthe viśrāntatāṃ prathayitum, [...]* (ABh2, vol. 2, p. 871-872; ABh3, vol. 2, p. 387). It could be translated as follows: “In order to show that these hand-gestures for representing (*abhinayahasta*) are similar to a fire-wheel, and to reveal the restfulness in one single representable meaning, just as one enters a single path and, since it is in the nature of roads to have muddy patches and bumps and holes, in order to remove these obstacles [one] throws sand [over the mud], removes the bumps and fills the holes, [...]”. In both cases, dance is seen to supply the unity or homogeneity required for the cognition to rest on its object, be it a single scene or the whole play, unity translated into the image of the circle of fire by which theatre is seen to unify the various representations, encompassing at the same time and without breaks even heterogeneous elements like songs.



units. If, at the level of the sentence, Abhinavagupta prescribes the use of dance in order to emphasize the sentence meaning which is represented, even when the single word meanings are given a visual representation through the display of successive hand-gestures, the use of dance, in the form of *karaṇas*, is explicitly encouraged, so as to mark their belonging to a single sentence, or a single course of performance. This is what Abhinavagupta explains in the fourth chapter, throwing at the same time light on the preceding passage through the use of a similar vocabulary:

Whenever the representation of the sentence meaning is seen as principal, the *karaṇas* themselves are predominant. But even when [single] representations of the word meanings are carried out, a *karaṇa* –[used] at the beginning, in the middle or at the end [of a sentence], according to opportunity– is necessary in announcing the inclusion [of the various words] in one single sentence (*ekavākyānupraveśa*) as the main thing. This is the secret teaching. For this very reason [Bharata] will say [in NŚ 8.15]: ‘Its *śākhā*, dance (*nṛtta*) and *aṅkura* are elements of the [bodily] representation’, for the inclusion [of the single word-meanings] in a [unique] course of action (*vartanānupraveśa*) by means of the *śākhā* alone would make no sense.<sup>57</sup>

Pushing the reasoning a little further, the definition given by Abhinavagupta to the *nṛttakaraṇas*, seen above, could be extended so as to include any beautiful movement leading from an initial position in space to a final one, hence, even to movements occurring between one representation and the other, or between one expressive gesture and the one immediately following it, without restriction to the canonical hundred and eight *karaṇas* ranging from *talapuṣpapuṭa* to *gaṅgāvatarāṇa*.<sup>58</sup>

Such an interpretation, accounting for an extended meaning of the term ‘dance’ and, through the extension of the meaning of dance’s main constituent the *karaṇa*, for its irruption into the realms of representation is, I believe, supported by another passage in the fourth chapter: after the enumeration of the hundred and eight *karaṇas*, the question of their number is raised, since not all of the *karaṇas* listed actually occur in the thirty-two *aṅgahāras* of the preliminary rite. Bharata gives, in reply, a list of occasions where *karaṇas* are used outside the *pūrvarāṅga*, on which Abhinavagupta comments: “Dance, which will be said to be an element (*vastutvena*) in representation (*abhinaye*), is employed because it hides the gaps occurring between the various representations.”<sup>59</sup> Abhinavagupta thus attempts to establish the autonomy of dance outside its canonical performance as part of the *aṅgahāras*, at the same time accounting for its autonomous function inside theatre and representation. This might in turn throw some light on an obscure passage in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, which has led to much confusion in evaluating the role of dance within the theatrical performance, the already quoted NŚ 8.15: “Its *śākhā*, dance (*nṛtta*) and *aṅkura* should be known here by practitioners as the elements of the [bodily] representation (*abhinaya*).”<sup>60</sup> As already mentioned, the *Abhinavabhāratī* on this

<sup>57</sup> ABh ad NŚ 4.31, vol. 1, p. 96: *yatra kvacid vākyārthābhinaya eva prādhānyena dr̥ṣyate, tatra karaṇānām eva prādhānyam. yatrāpi padārthābhinayāḥ kriyante, tatrāpy ekavākyānupraveśaprādhānyaprakhyāpanāyām avaśyam ādau madhye ’nte vā yathāvasaraṃ karaṇam ity upaniṣat. ata eva vakṣyati “asya śākhā ca nṛttaṃ ca tathāivāṅkura eva ca. vastūny abhinayasyeha” iti. vartanānupraveśo hi śākhayaiva gatārthaḥ syāt.*

<sup>58</sup> At a certain point, Bharata defines a *karaṇa* as a combination of a still posture (*sthāna*), a movement of the feet (*cārī*) and a hand-gesture for dance (*nṛttahasta*), and Abhinavagupta seems to envisage the possibility that the number of *karaṇas* thus created might be innumerable. However, he adds, they are stated to the extent as they are used in *aṅgahāras*. See ABh ad NŚ 4.59b, vol. 1, p. 95: *ānantyaṃ yady api karaṇānām tathāpy aṅgahāropayogitvād etāvad uktam.*

<sup>59</sup> ABh ad NŚ 4.55b-56a, vol. 1, p. 94: *abhinaye vastutvena yan nṛttaṃ vakṣyate ’bhinayāntarālavaraticchidrapracchādanād etat prayujyate.*

<sup>60</sup> NŚ 8.15: *asya śākhā ca nṛttaṃ ca tathāivāṅkura eva ca | vastūny abhinayasyeha vijñeyāni prayokṭṛbhiḥ || Śākhā and aṅkura are two stages in the protocol of the play, belonging to the homogeneous representation through the body (śārīrasāmānyābhinaya). On the use of these elements, see Bansat-Boudon 1989-90.*

chapter is lost, with, at present, little hope that it will ever surface. However, it has been shown to be possible to reconstruct the context for Abhinavagupta's understanding of Bharata's words, namely, the problematic relation between dance and representation which I have tried to delineate in this article.

#### 4. Preliminary conclusions

In the *Abhinavabhāratī*, dance is no longer intended to be performed for the mere sake of providing variety to the *pūrvvaraṅga*, nor can it be confined to the hundred and eight *karaṇas* described by Bharata. By an extension of the term *karaṇa*, dance can apply to any action, having no practical result nor mimetic function, but endowed with a beautifying character. Hence it applies even to all those intervening movements which are not formally codified under the category of *abhinaya*, but which account for a necessary continuity and unity of the action. While treating dance in the larger sphere of theatre, Abhinavagupta succeeds in integrating it into his aesthetic discourse, refining at the same time his views on the functioning of *abhinaya*. But he might have been aiming at something more than that.

If, on the one hand, Abhinavagupta legitimises the inclusion of dance within theatre, side by side with representation, on the other, he has the freedom to introduce in the long discussion in chapter four many 'new' spectacular genres which, difficult to establish as forms of either theatre or dance, were not contemplated in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, and to treat them at length without exceeding the boundaries of Bharata's tenets.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> A discussion about the development of the 'minor' genres of performance, centred on the tripartition of the spectacular object already found in the *Daśarūpaka*, and on the different option adopted in the *Abhinavabhāratī*, forms the subject of a study which is under preparation. For a general survey of these minor or secondary genres of performance, see for instance Bose (1991).

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